



The Gazette

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ALIX GUILTY IN TWO MURDERS

PORTRAYED HERSELF AS VICTIM South Shore woman set fires that killed her mother, infant son, jury decides

DOZENS INJURED IN HUGE EXPLOSIONS AT BRITISH FUEL STORAGE FACILITY



A police officer wears a protective mask at a roadblock close to the fuel depot near the town of Hemel Hempstead, 40 kilometres north of London. Police say they do not know the cause of yesterday's explosions, which came in the wake of a call by Al-Qa'ida for attacks on facilities carrying oil "stolen" from Muslims.

Blasts follow Al-Qa'ida's call for attacks

DON MELVIN
COX NEWS SERVICE

LONDON – A series of huge explosions at a fuel depot north of London rocked southern England early yesterday, sending flames 100 metres into the sky and spreading a dense col-

umn of smoke over the countryside.

Police – while saying they did not know the cause of the blasts – said the incident appeared to be an accident. But four days earlier, an Al-Qa'ida videotape appeared on the Internet calling for attacks on fa-

cilities carrying oil "stolen" from Muslims in the Middle East, the Associated Press reported.

Nerves in Britain, still frayed after four suicide bombers in London killed 52 others and themselves in July, were rattled by televised images of fresh de-

struction. There were reports that some residents of the area said they heard a low-flying plane before the explosions, which began at 6:03 a.m.

But police maintained they did not suspect terrorism – though the British Broadcasting Corp. reported that a probe

has begun that will include anti-terrorist police. "All indications at this stage are that this was an accident," said Frank Whiteley, chief of police in the surrounding county of Hertfordshire.

Please see EXPLOSIONS, Page A4
'End of the world,' Page A4

ALLISON HANES
GAZETTE JUSTICE REPORTER

Hard as she tried, Mélanie Alix failed to persuade a jury she was the victim.

On their sixth day of deliberations, the seven women and five men – who listened for almost two weeks as the 31-year-old South Shore resident recounted her troubled life in painstaking detail – instead decided yesterday that Alix is a cold-blooded killer who targeted vulnerable members of her own family.

Alix barely flinched as the jury found her guilty as charged of arson and first-degree murder in the death of her wheelchair-bound mother, Francine Lévesque, in a 2001 house fire.

They also declared her guilty of arson and first-degree murder in the death of her one-year-old son, Matisse Alix-Leblanc, in a separate fire two years later, as well as a charge of attempted murder against another person who cannot be named.

The case hinged on evidence showing that both Lévesque and Matisse perished of smoke inhalation long before firefighters and paramedics arrived, prosecutor Julie Beauchesne said after the verdict.

"It wasn't just the cause of death, it was the time of death that was important in this case," Beauchesne said.

There were also eerie and inexplicable similarities between the two cases that went far beyond coincidence, she said.

Please see ALIX, Page A3

Hostages' families agonize

PETER GOODSPEED
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Agonizing days have passed since the deadline set by kidnappers in Iraq holding four peace activist hostages, including two Canadians, and no news has emerged as to their fate.

Family and friends of the hostages have endured growing anxiety waiting for word of the four Christian peacemakers, held by an Iraqi group, the Swords of Righteousness Brigades.

Canadians James Loney, 41, of Toronto, and Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32, formerly of Montreal and now studying in New Zealand, have been held hostage since Nov. 26.

Please see HOSTAGES, Page A4
Interest up in group, Page A4
Campaign turns ugly, Page A23

IN FOCUS

Change in Chile

Conservative Chile takes a big step closer to electing its first female president as favoured candidate Michelle Bachelet appeared on track for a commanding victory in a closely watched election. **Page A2**

Library privileges

Some of the 15 suburbs that will break off from Montreal and become municipalities again on Jan. 1 might allow Montrealers to continue using their libraries. **Page A6**

A little off the top

If any of the 34 players invited to the Canadian junior hockey team's selection camp wonder what they have to do to make the team, they can start with a haircut. **Page C6**

Katrina's shadow

With attention riveted on New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the plight of Cameron Parish's residents after Hurricane Rita has been all but ignored. **Page A26**

'Beer' comment leaves Martin woozy

Liberals try to contain damage after aide says parents would party on child-care cash

MARK KENNEDY
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

BEAMSVILLE, ONT. – Prime Minister Paul Martin tried to stem voter backlash yesterday after a se-

nior aide publicly criticized the Conservative child-care policy as flawed because it could allow parents to use their child-care benefits to simply buy "beer and popcorn."

Scott Reid, Martin's director of communications, quickly retracted the comment, made during a Sunday morning panel discussion on CBC television.

By then the problem had been compounded by John Duffy, another Martin adviser.

Please see COMMENT, Page A12

HISTORIC RIDING, HISTORIC TWIST

One of Canada's most illustrious ridings has an unusual twist in this election. A full-status Indian is running against the Bloc incumbent, an Innu. **Page A12**

QUOTE

A boy can learn a lot from a dog: obedience, loyalty, and the importance of turning around three times before lying down.

Robert Benchley

INDEX

Annie's Mailbox .B15
Arts&LifeD1
ClassifiedE1
ComicsB13
DrivingE1
EditorialsA30
Kid ScoopD8
Legals/Auctions E16
NationA13
ObituariesC11
OpinionA31
Puzzles Page...C10
SeniorsD2
SportsC1
TV ListingsD6
What's OnD7
WorldA22
Your Business . .B1

WEATHER

Flurries
High -7° Low -17° **Page B15**



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